

November 25, 2014

November Nuggets - November 25



KENTUCKY
Adult Education

Your future starts here!

The following email was sent to the KYAE listserv.

Trouble breaking through the “zero barrier” on RLA extended responses?

It is not your imagination. Zero is the most common score currently earned on the extended response items on the Reasoning through Language Arts (RLA) test. This is true not just at your center or in Kentucky—this is what is happening nationally as well. After spending more than a decade coaxing students to draw from their personal experiences to respond to a general prompt, we are now shifting to a more rigorous writing exercise.

The 2014 extended responses are not opinion pieces. The student is asked to read like a detective and write like a reporter by identifying the author’s claims and citing the textual evidence of the author that makes the strongest claim. This is a huge shift from identifying a personal opinion on a topic. Students should avoid using phrases such as “I believe,” “in my opinion,” “I assume,” etc. Instead, students will need strong modeling and examples of the critical thinking skills needed to identify which argument has the best evidence to support it. It is not enough to merely copy text from the source material. Please require students to paraphrase and explain the source material as they build their argument. This is a major change for GED® writing instruction and a high bar to set for our students.

As you begin to adapt your instruction to the new writing requirements, start with an emphasis on traits 2 (organizational structure) and 3 (clarity and command of Standard English conventions) while working toward trait 1 (creation of arguments and use of evidence).

While we are making this shift, students are managing to pass the RLA test. In fact, it is the test with the highest pass rate. However, this is not the time to back off writing instruction. It is a necessary transition for our instruction. This kind of analytical writing is an important skill needed for both employment and postsecondary education.

Some students who have scored at the GED® Honors level have done so scoring a 1 on each of the three traits of the RLA extended response. Those scoring 2 on the extended response items are truly writing at the level to be successful in credit-bearing college classes.

[Click here](#) for some talking points from GED Testing Service® staff which include the main reasons for “earned” zeroes on the RLA extended response items. **The RLA extended response answer guidelines are also [located here](#).**

The writing collaborations, facilitated by Dawn Hanzel, also provide a more in-depth look at the constructed responses as well as other ELA content and skills. In addition, Dawn is available to provide instructional assistance to individual programs in preparing students in writing. Be sure to take advantage of these opportunities to have your questions answered and share your ideas.

If you have any questions on this topic, contact Rae Smith at rae.smith@ky.gov.

To see past November Nuggets, go here: <http://kyae.ky.gov/educators/novnuggets.htm>.